

A Message from the President

This is not a typical strategic plan.

Most university plans are built around incremental progress, steady steps toward a near-term future that looks much like the present. This plan, however, sets its sights on 2040, so we can imagine our future and build it together. We do so because we are living through seismic shifts in higher education. We face a landscape that demands of us new eyes, nimbleness and the courage to embrace change.

One shift is already well underway. Artificial intelligence is reshaping how scholarship is conducted, how students learn, and what employers expect of our graduates. We are being asked to prepare students for futures we cannot fully see, using tools that are rapidly evolving. That challenge reaches into the nature of what a university does: how we teach, how we define learning, and what a JMU degree is understood to certify. This plan commits to navigating that challenge deliberately and with integrity.

The environment of college athletics continues to evolve rapidly. In a short period of time, the rules governing college athletics have been rewritten, shifting and even redefining what it means to compete and win at the highest levels, and what it costs. James Madison University has invested meaningfully in athletics, and that investment has paid impactful dividends across different stakeholder groups: in enrollment, in national visibility, in the pride that comes from watching JMU succeed on a bigger stage. But the environment we are competing in today demands more, and so we must carefully—as an institution—determine our path forward, navigating and deploying our future investments through the lens of our academic and research priorities and peer set.

A third shift is broader but no less consequential. Across the country, public confidence in higher education is eroding. JMU has earned a strong reputation, but reputation is not a shield, especially in the face of questions about cost, outcomes, and what a college degree is worth. Families are making hard calculations about return on investment. Legislatures are asking hard questions about accountability. This plan squarely faces these issues to focus on delivering what we promise: graduates who are prepared, experiences that are meaningful, and a community that holds itself to account. That, in a nutshell is our vision: The Madison Promise.

The Madison Promise is bold because the moment demands boldness. And it is honest about what boldness requires: real resources. We cannot pursue transformative goals

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on a maintenance budget. My leadership team and I have pledged to make this our priority.

The Madison Promise is bold because you helped create it. Hundreds of members of the JMU community contributed to what you are reading. It was also guided by core values that define this institution: a commitment to the public good; a conviction that the student experience is at the center of everything we do; and a responsibility to be excellent stewards of the public resources entrusted to us.

The Madison Promise is bold because it relies on a team approach to make progress. Every division will build its own response to this plan, and areas will identify objectives that support their own work towards achieving our guidepost goals. Whether you are teaching in a classroom, advising a student, managing a budget, coordinating an event, or working on a housekeeping team, this plan is yours. We are all educators at JMU.

JMU has long been defined by a culture that, above all, emphasizes excellence. We do things well, and we take pride in that. We are scrappy, often taking on challenges bigger than our resources might suggest we should. This plan leans into that. What it also asks is that we become a community willing to take risks in service to that excellence. We may not be wildly successful in every domain we pursue—but we are going to try anyway. And if we don't fail somewhere along the way, we probably didn't push ourselves far enough.

At James Madison University we learn from each other and with each other, and that is what makes this place so special. That spirit of care, of showing up for one another, of opening doors is the foundation on which everything we are building rests. The Madison Promise asks us to open a bigger door: one that leads to a bolder, more audacious, more future-ready JMU.

Let's walk through it together.

President Jim Schmidt

The Madison Promise

Mission Statement:

We are a community committed to preparing students to become educated and enlightened citizens who lead productive and meaningful lives

Guidepost Goals:

To measure success, we are establishing the following guidepost goals. These audacious outcomes will keep us focused on the future as we develop strategies, create new initiatives, and allocate resources:

| Guidepost Goal | 2025 Baseline | 2032 Target | 2040 Target |
|---|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Increase our first-to-second year retention rate | 91.3% | 93% | 95% |
| Increase our four-year graduation rate | 68% | 71% | 75% |
| Achieve a high career outcomes rate for bachelor's degree earners after 12 months | 95% | 97% | 98% |
| Rank in the top 50 nationally among public universities. | 79 | 65 | <50 |
| Achieve a lower acceptance rate | 66% | 60% | 54% |
| Grow overall student enrollment | 23,157 | 26,000 | 30,000 |
| Increase the on-campus housing capacity | 28% | 40% | 60% |
| Increase state-wide economic impact | \$793M | \$1.2B | \$2B |
| Increase annual research expenditures | \$34M | \$50M | \$75M+ |
| Increase the number of research doctorates awarded annually | 47 | 63 | 80 |
| Increase sustained philanthropic giving | \$32.8M | \$50M | \$75M |

The Madison Promise: JMU 2032 Strategic Plan Draft Pillars

To realize our 2040 targets, we must begin with strategic progress. The first milestone is our 2032 strategic plan, which outlines the key pillars that will guide our priorities over the next six years. Through targeted initiatives, we will advance these pillars and lay the foundation for continued momentum toward our bold, long-term 2040 goals.

1. Enhance the Value, Purpose, and Impact of a JMU Education

Anchored in pathbreaking education, discovery-driven innovation, and real-world application, a JMU education is marked by the distinctive set of skills and knowledge that all JMU graduates develop during their undergraduate career. When considered holistically, these JMU Distinctives set the JMU graduate apart from their peers and will be critical for their futures. Through the strategic plan, we identify specific strategies to enhance these distinctives such that by 2040, JMU Distinctives truly separate a JMU graduate from all others.

The JMU Distinctives:

- **Leadership Development:** As one of only 25 institutions to receive the Carnegie Leadership for Public Purpose designations, JMU's leadership development practices permeate JMU's unique change culture and highlight both curricular and co-curricular training for students, faculty, staff, alumni, and external stakeholders.
- **Ethical Reasoning:** For over a decade, JMU's first-year welcome experience has emphasized ethical reasoning. By engaging with the Eight Key Questions (8KQ) framework, students develop the skills to explore morally complex situations with curiosity, evaluate multiple ethical viewpoints, and make intentional decisions.
- **Discovery & Innovation:** Through a teacher-scholar model that integrates rigorous inquiry with exceptional teaching, JMU prepares students at every level to engage deeply with knowledge. Undergraduates learn through inquiry and discovery, professional graduates apply scholarship to practice, and doctoral candidates advance their disciplines through original research.
- **Civic Engagement:** JMU graduates engage thoughtfully and responsibly in civic life by developing skills in dialogue, deliberation, critical thinking, collaboration, and civic action, practiced throughout the undergraduate experience in academic and co-curricular settings.
- **Service for Public Purpose:** JMU graduates contribute to the greater good through community-based curricular and co-curricular experiences. Our Community

Engagement Carnegie classification and APLU Innovation and Economic Prosperity Designation illustrate our national prominence in this area and the commitment of our students, faculty, and staff to service locally and globally.

- **Power Skill Development:** JMU will embed the development of *power* skills — essential capacities for engaging productively in careers and continuing education — through all aspects of the JMU experience. All students will develop measurable skills in communication, problem-solving, and the ability to work in teams.
- **Well-being:** As the only institution in Virginia to sign the Okanagan Charter, JMU is committed to a vision of health, well-being, and sustainability that extends beyond individual wellness, embracing the Charter's focus on people, place, and planet within every dimension of university life.

The strategic plan is a promise to society of what it can expect of a JMU graduate. We have such strong confidence in the value, purpose, and impact of a JMU education that we guarantee JMU graduates will possess the skills, purpose, and confidence to create the future. This is a shared commitment between the university and its students, families, employers, and society that JMU will provide a dynamic, future-focused education that develops the knowledge, skills, and character graduates need to thrive. Students commit to pursuing academic excellence and personal development, engaging fully in the academic and co-curricular life of the university, and contributing to a community grounded in curiosity, collaboration, and civic responsibility.

The Madison Promise Guarantees

Two guarantees highlight this component of the Madison Promise:

- **The Employment Guarantee.** JMU is committed to ensuring that every graduate will achieve a positive career outcome — employment, continued education, volunteer experience, or military service — within one year of graduation. Graduates who have not yet reached that milestone will receive personalized support through career coaching, alumni and employer networking, and access to additional education or internship opportunities at no cost.
- **The Employer Guarantee.** JMU stands behind the career readiness of every graduate. If an employer identifies a gap in a graduate's power skills — critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, or the ability to work in teams — within two years of graduation, JMU will provide access to coaching services and a personalized series of asynchronous, non-credit modules at no cost to the graduate or the employer.

What strategies will we use to ensure that we enhance the value, impact, and purpose of a JMU education?

- **Implement the Employer and Employment Guarantees.** Successful implementation requires funding the training and coaching needed to provide alumni with the resources offered by the Guarantees.
- **Create a JMU Distinctives team.** Create a cross-divisional team to establish a university-wide process for elevating JMU Distinctives in the student experience. This team will lead efforts to design curricular and co-curricular experiences that emphasize and enhance the development of JMU Distinctives among students.
- **Embed civic engagement and deliberative dialogue within the student experience.** JMU will prepare students for a polarized world where they can engage in constructive dialogue across difference. Through a shared curriculum, which includes constitutional literacy, civic leadership, and civil discourse, we will ensure that all students develop the capacity to listen critically, question with curiosity, consider differing ideas with fairness, and approach difficult conversations with confidence.
- **Develop a “Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLEs), Mentorship, and Undergraduate Research Hub” to ensure that all JMU students complete credible, high-quality co-curricular experiences.** With a modest physical presence, the Hub is primarily a *conceptual center of a cross-JMU network* connecting the operational work of three high-engagement practices. The Hub will facilitate the accomplishment of three strategic initiatives:
 - **Expand access to high-quality Work-Based Learning Experiences on- and off-campus.** JMU will ensure that students can apply their knowledge in professional settings and build professional relationships through WBLEs. This may include internships, research roles, community projects, student employment, and course-embedded collaborations. JMU will also deliberately expand the number of on-campus student employment roles that meet WBLE criteria — providing professional supervision, defined learning outcomes, structured reflection, mentorship and feedback — so that more students gain substantive professional development through the work they do on campus. A micro-credentialing and badging model will provide tangible evidence of completion for students to showcase their WBLE to future employers.

- **Create a coordinated mentorship ecosystem throughout a student's undergraduate experience.** This scaffolded, three-tiered mentorship pathway will span all four undergraduate years. The first year promotes overall well-being through a peer-to-peer mentoring model. Faculty and staff mentoring in year two promotes academic integration. Juniors and seniors work with alumni and professionals as mentors to ensure they are career-ready at commencement.
- **Enhance support for undergraduate research.** As part of the Hub, JMU will expand the infrastructure and opportunities for undergraduate research. As part of this expansion, the university will create a student-facing and faculty-serving office to help facilitate opportunities for and access to authentic undergraduate research experiences.
- **Expand student work opportunities across campus.** JMU will expand access to meaningful on-campus work that contributes to learning, belonging, and preparation for life after graduation. On-campus student employment leads to better student outcomes, improves the affordability of a JMU education, and can address vacancies in high-turnover professional positions. This initiative will lead to cost savings related to health insurance and benefits that can be reallocated to address employee compensation as well as other strategic initiatives. JMU will also establish student employment opportunities that provide tuition assistance in exchange for work, and elevate certain student work employment to include supervision, mentoring, and skill development that prepares the student for future career opportunities.
- **Pilot a work-to-learn program.** JMU will launch a competitive work-to-learn pilot for students, offering full in-state tuition and fees for 15 hours of weekly work during the academic year and 30+ hours of work during the summer and university breaks. Students may participate for up to four years, advancing skills, responsibilities, and learning outcomes aligned with WBLE standards. Chosen through an application process, the university will prioritize in-state students and full Pell recipients, though all students will be encouraged to apply. This program is a specific initiative contained under the broader strategy to expand student work opportunities.
- **Expand need-based scholarships that honor students of merit and achievement.** To attract the best and the brightest students, we will grow need-based scholarships to support high-achieving students. These efforts will open new financial aid opportunities that recognize excellence, reduce barriers to access, and empower talented students of all backgrounds to pursue their academic and personal goals at JMU.

- **Leverage a modernized intercollegiate athletics program to enhance the Madison Experience.** University athletics plays a vital role in brand awareness and advancing the institution’s mission of fostering excellence, leadership, and community. While continuing to strive to be broad-based and comprehensive, Dukes Athletics will sustain and strengthen its impact through targeted and strategic investments and growth opportunities, which will deepen its engagement with an even broader community, strengthening partnerships, service opportunities, and shared school spirit.

2. Invest in Our People

At JMU, we are all educators; investment in our people is investment in the mission itself. Faculty and staff are central to the student experience, the advancement of research and discovery, the success of community partnerships, and the vitality of campus life. JMU’s ability to deliver on the Madison Promise depends on the strength, capacity, and well-being of the people who bring the university’s mission to life. As the university pursues an ambitious strategic vision, JMU will ensure that expectations for innovation and growth are matched with the workforce capacity, resources, and support necessary for success. Through strategic investments in recruitment, professional development, compensation, and workload alignment, JMU will strengthen the conditions that allow faculty and staff to thrive and enable the success of the Madison Promise.

What strategies will we use to ensure we are supporting our faculty and staff?

- **Aligning faculty and staff workload, incentives, administrative and data support, and responsibilities with strategic priorities.** The strategic plan proposes a series of bold initiatives that will require faculty and staff engagement to be successful. We will commit to a review of faculty and staff responsibilities, incentive structures, and support mechanisms to identify pathways for maintaining appropriate workloads.
- **Establish procedures for sunseting activities.** We will implement a process to strategically sunset university activities to allow better alignment of faculty and staff workload, positively affecting student success and increasing retention and graduation rates.
- **Enhance employee well-being.** JMU will build a campus culture in which the health and flourishing of faculty and staff is a shared institutional responsibility. We will advance that commitment by sustaining and scaling the work of the President's

Council on Health and Well-Being and embedding holistic support across policies, practices, and campus environments.

- **Increase compensation.** JMU will use multiple strategies to increase compensation for faculty and staff, including advocating at the state level to increase funding, resourcing tools for compensation increases (e.g., in-band adjustments (IBAs) for classified and part-time employees, target salary actions for administrative and professional staff), and focusing efforts to address faculty compression and inversion.
- **Advance Reengineering Madison.** Modernize the technology infrastructure that faculty and staff use to reduce administrative burden and enable more effective collaboration. Reengineering Madison will ensure that expectations for innovation are matched with the systems faculty and staff need to do their work effectively.

3. Chart a New Path as a National Research University

Over the past quarter-century, James Madison University has built its reputation as an institution known for blending inspired teaching with rigorous scholarship. This integration infuses classrooms with the energy of discovery, fuels transformative education, attracts exceptional talent and vital resources, and generates societal impact across health, technology, sustainability, and more. Through this distinctive teacher-scholar model, JMU has transformed from a respected regional comprehensive university into a nationally recognized R2 doctoral research institution. Guided by our new strategic plan, JMU will elevate its national prominence by becoming an R1 institution through selective growth in high-impact graduate programs, increased scholarship and external funding, elevated recruitment of international students and faculty, and an unwavering commitment to signature undergraduate excellence.

What strategies will we use to successfully chart this new path as a research institution?

- **Expand the research infrastructure that supports faculty and graduate student productivity.** JMU will invest in research infrastructure and faculty development, strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration, and expand partnerships with federal agencies, corporations, and foundations to grow sponsored programs and advance discovery. Work will focus on hiring additional faculty in strategic areas, centralizing graduate student support—including adding graduate housing, building international collaboration, embedding dedicated research administrators within each college, and expanding library and IT infrastructure.

- **Strategically expand doctoral programs and research in areas where Commonwealth needs, bipartisan funding durability, and institutional strengths align.** JMU will expand graduate programs in fields of existing research strength and workforce demand. Graduate students will play a central role in the university's research enterprise and in mentoring undergraduate researchers.
Programs/research areas to consider adding include, but are not limited to:
 - Artificial Intelligence
 - Biotech/Pharma Research
 - Civic Education
 - Intelligence Analysis
 - Occupational and Physical Therapy
 - Rural Health
- **Create new research centers of excellence.** JMU will establish interdisciplinary centers that bring together faculty, graduate students, and external partners, both here and abroad, to address pressing regional and national challenges. Each center will be selected based on alignment between Commonwealth workforce needs, external funding opportunity, demonstrated faculty research activity, and institutional expertise. Centers will pursue both national research distinction and measurable regional impact.
- **Integrate opportunities for authentic undergraduate research throughout the curriculum:** JMU will build on its strengths in student research by making participation in undergraduate research and creative inquiry a core part of the JMU student experience. The university will expand opportunities for students to engage in research in all disciplines and recognize faculty contributions to this work in hiring, development, and promotion.

4. Become the Preferred Partner to Meet the Needs of the Commonwealth, and Beyond

JMU will be the Shenandoah Valley and Commonwealth's most trusted, responsive, innovative, and preferred university partner. We will link students and faculty with industry, government, and nonprofit collaborators to translate discovery into real-world solutions that fuel entrepreneurship, innovation, sustainability, and economic development in and beyond the Shenandoah Valley. Through collaborative partnerships, JMU will position Virginia as a national and global leader.

What strategies will we implement to become the preferred partner in the area?

- **Establish a coordinated university structure for responsive partner service and improved project management.** This structure will clearly define cross-functional responsibilities to provide responsive partner service, guide external stakeholders through university processes, manage complex projects, collect and communicate economic impact data, and create transparent, repeatable pathways for internships, applied research, and workforce training. This structure will elevate and integrate existing efforts while maintaining distributed expertise and shared accountability.
- **Develop academic programs aligned with workforce and economic development priorities to strengthen regional talent pipelines in strategic areas.** JMU will utilize, expand, and create academic programs and partnerships that prepare our students to serve the Commonwealth and the region's workforce demands. The university will collaborate with industry, nonprofit, and government sectors on customized workforce-development initiatives, develop revenue-generating stackable credentials, certificates, undergraduate and graduate programs aligned with industry needs, and scale lifelong learning opportunities for alumni and the broader Virginia community. We will focus our efforts on creating and expanding offerings in areas such as:
 - Advanced Manufacturing
 - Agricultural Technology and Food Systems
 - Artificial Intelligence, Data Science and Applied Analytics
 - Cybersecurity and Cloud Computing
 - Education (primary, middle, and secondary)
 - Energy, Sustainability, and Environmental Resilience
 - Engineering (civil, environmental, systems, and automation)
 - Healthcare, with an emphasis on rural health
 - Real Estate
 - Supply Chain, Logistics, and Operations Management
- **Lead a regional commercialization network.** JMU will lead a Shenandoah Valley commercialization and entrepreneurship network, convening schools, businesses, medical systems, and community organizations to turn discoveries into new businesses, quality jobs, and community impact while attracting investment to the region.

- **Expand the College of Health and Behavioral Studies.** This expansion will help support increased enrollment in key programs with high workforce demand, helping to meet local and Commonwealth needs in key areas such as health care.

5. Create an Innovative Campus Community

To support our vision for next-generation learning, research, and partnership experiences, JMU will transform its physical environment to be sustainability-focused and deeply integrated with its community. We will be the “Friendly Campus” within the “Friendly City.” The campus of the future isn’t just a place of learning; it is an anchor and hub for cultural, educational, and economic collaboration that will bring in revenue to allow for further investment in our mission.

What strategies will we use to successfully create an innovative campus community?

- **Build new residential facilities.** By increasing on-campus housing, JMU will create a campus that provides the academic, social, and basic needs to support the student experience, improve success outcomes, and allow students to thrive. Living on campus has been shown to affect student outcomes such as retention and graduation positively, and can help improve student mental health by decreasing loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Investing in more residential facilities will benefit the local community, as off-campus properties can be repurposed to address affordable housing needs, and traffic congestion on city streets will be eased as fewer students commute to campus.
- **Create and execute a strategic enrollment management plan.** To position JMU for success, the institution must identify how to manage enrollment growth among different populations, such as undergraduate residential students, graduate students, in-state, out-of-state, and international students, and adult and online learners. This plan will guide decision-making, establish realistic benchmarks, and ensure that our student population changes in predictable and planned ways. This plan will also include a scholarship growth plan to ensure we can recruit the best and brightest students.
- **Establish new university practices and structures designed to increase community collaboration and maximize facility use.** JMU will serve as an anchor for the region’s cultural, recreational, industry, and athletic events by hosting concerts, music and art festivals, tournaments, and conferences in campus venues. The university will partner with regional tourism to drive year-round events and

community engagement. Systems will be re-imagined to improve space scheduling and availability to members of campus and to the broader community.

- **Design and build the Madison District.** JMU will transform the neighborhood on the east side of Bridgeforth Stadium into the new center of campus: a vibrant hub that unites learning, living, and community engagement. This is a literal new front porch. The redevelopment will include a new student union, student housing, mixed-use spaces, and retail that stimulate local economic growth and enhance campus life.
- **Establish JMU as a Living Lab to connect university programs, people, and places.** JMU will reimagine the relationship between campus and community through campus-based applied learning. This framework will be developed and scaled based on existing areas of academic strength and themed to give maximum focus on the distinctiveness of what JMU offers.

Funding the Promise: Aligning Mission and Investment

The Madison Promise will align investment with our mission to prepare our students to be educated and enlightened citizens leading productive and meaningful lives. JMU's rise in national prominence will be powered by a comprehensive effort to attract and secure transformative investment in the university. To accomplish our vision, we will:

- Strategically realign institutional resources to elevate strategic priorities.
- Launch our third comprehensive campaign to attract philanthropic supporters — including alumni, parents, and friends — as well as public and private foundations, corporations, and individual investors.
- Actively engage state and federal partners to support JMU initiatives that are mutually beneficial to the university and the Commonwealth.
- Pursue local, state, and federal grants.
- Develop innovative new revenue streams
- Continue thoughtful approaches to tuition and fee increases.

As we look ahead, we have identified a set of promising ideas that will shape our next chapter. Our work now is to engage, resource, and implement these priorities — recognizing that tensions will emerge and committing to continuously reassessing scope, scale, and feasibility so that we remain excellent stewards of our people, mission, and

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resources. This is an open invitation to join us in shaping the future of higher education through shared vision and commitment. Together, we will build a university that leads with purpose, innovation, and public impact.